

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Justin Zhao,
Director of the Himalayan Light Art Scholarship Award

Sangeeta Thapa,
Founder | Director - Siddhartha Art Gallery | Siddhartha Arts Foundation,
Founder | Chair - Kathmandu Triennale, Nepal

Siddhartha Art Gallery Team:
Binod Adhikari, Binod Bhujel and Urza Acharya



The Shape of Tear. Acrylic on Canvas, 3panels, 12x40in each



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27 Dotted with Swosti.
Acrylic on Canvas, 12x12in



43 Dotted Harihari Mandal.
Acrylic on Canvas, 12x12in



6 Dotted Bar with Magarmacho.
Acrylic on Canvas, 12x12in



5 Dotted Bar with 11 Dotted Taate Flower.
Acrylic on Canvas, 12x12in

A WAITING

Riti Maharjan



The Symmetrical Journey. Acrylic on Canvas, 39x47in



हिमालयन प्रकाश HIMALAYAN LIGHT

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BY 慕的尼泊尔
www.gatewayofnepal.com

THE HIMALAYAN LIGHT SCHOLARSHIP AWARD

The Himalayan Light Art Scholarship is sponsored by senior Chinese artist Zhao Jianqui to foster and promote the creation and production of Nepal's young artist generation, whose quality of work impressed Zhao greatly during his visit and exhibition to Nepal in 2015. This award intends to encourage young artists to explore deeper into their skills and the myriad of themes in Nepali art and also hopes to create opportunities for more trans-Himalayan artistic exchange in the future. Our past recipients of the Himalayan Light Award include Prithvi Shrestha and Mann Gurung in 2019, Lavkant Chaudhary in 2020, Jagdish Moktan and Priyanka Singh Maharjan in 2021, Subas Tamang also in 2021, and Suresh Basnet in 2022. Riti Maharjan is the most recent recipient of the award in 2022.

~ Justin Zhao

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Awaiting

Riti Maharjan

The development and succession of civilisation and culture is an ongoing phenomenon. In the development of Nepali folk art, wall paintings and 'Aripan' or floor mandalas, made by the women from Mithila culture are an integral part of folk culture and tradition. Nepal's art is diverse and is represented by various genres. The artistic knowledge and legacy of our ancestors needs to be preserved and bequeathed to the next generation.

In this exhibition, some of my artworks are inspired by the mural art found during my study of art in the hilly regions of Nepal. Historically, in the structure of Nepali society, men took care of the work outside the home while women performed household chores. I found that the women in some of the hilly regions of Lamjung, also created artworks for the beauty, purity and auspiciousness of their homes. If art is only associated with cultural and religious rituals, it is likely to disappear.

In these hilly regions, I found villages emptied by internal migration and the lure of foreign employment. I saw that the reconstruction works after the earthquake do not pay homage to the mural art tradition painted by the women folk of this region, and sadly the modern structures are bereft of this art practice.

I was excited to study the faded lines of those murals on the surface of mud walls and I have referenced the imagery of the murals as the theme of my paintings. I viewed the symmetric, geometric pattern that is drawn by employing dots, and is then connected to each other with certain calculations. It is a source of inspiration for me to see the artwork of our ancestors, who labored on despite the scarcity of art materials.

In the context of creating paintings, my works are a narrative of the pain of ageing parents—the loneliness and isolation they feel as they wait for their children, the pain of young children growing up without the love and affection from their parents. The bleak economic situation of the country has pushed the youth to leave the villages and the country to feed their families. This migration has had an impact on the psyche of three generations of Nepali society. My paintings long for all those young footsteps to return home.

In a situation where society has not recognised the artistic sensibilities and expression of rural women, I have used their motifs and patterns and incorporated them with my contemporary subjects. In the future, I see that the richness and beauty of their art can be further advanced and translated into multiple mediums.



A little moment of Joy.
Acrylic on canvas, 39x39in



My Father's Hat.
Acrylic on canvas, 35.5x47in



The Melting Emotion.
Acrylic on canvas, 39x47in



A Bud's Dream.
Acrylic on canvas, 39x47in

GALLERY STATEMENT

Sangeeta Thapa

Founder/Director - Siddhartha Art Gallery / Siddhartha Arts Foundation
Founder/Chair - Kathmandu Triennale

In 2016, Riti Maharjan received a prestigious bilateral Chinese government scholarship from the Nepal Academy Of Fine Arts to pursue an MFA in painting from the Nanjing University of Arts in China. A year later, she was joined by her colleague Rabindra Khaniya from Lalitkala Campus, who received a scholarship from the Chinese government to study printmaking. After returning from China, Riti began teaching art at Lalitkala Campus, and a year after the pandemic, she married fellow artist Rabindra Khaniya.

While travelling to her husband's village—Major Gaun, in Rainas Municipality, Lamjung, she was amazed to see the beautiful paintings that the women from the Brahmin community had made on the walls of their homes and how they had decorated the sacred tulsī mutt.

In 2022, Riti decided to study those mural paintings around the villages of Lamjung and Tanahu. In the course of her research, she learnt that this tradition had also been shared in the local community and absorbed by the women from the neighbouring Newa community. Riti was captivated by the simplicity and beauty of these paintings, which depicted Hindu deities and geometric *yantra* forms. The fact that the depiction of the deities had a striking resemblance to Mithila forms posed perplexing questions—did Mithila artists visit Lamjung at some point in history? Could the geometric forms created by the women originate from the sacred *yantra* forms called Sarboto Bhadra? Priests make these *yantras* during sacred eka and saptaha pujas where special prayers from the Bhagavad Gita are read. The *yantra* is the asanas or the locus where the Gods are invited to seat themselves, and a kalasha is placed in the centre of the *yantra* to mark their presence. The wall paintings made by the women reflect their piety and a yearning to assert their place and space in the spiritual mapping conducted by the priests. One could surmise that the murals were thus conceived to make their house sacrosanct.

In the course of her research, Rita was also struck by the sheer ingenuity of the women—the measurements and dots that they used to create the grid or template for their sacred geometry. Were these skills taught to them by the priests, or did this mimicry come from surreptitious observation? The fact that these paintings survive means that patriarchy was not threatened by image making of the women folk. Were these images initially created from the left-over traditional pigments used by the priests? While conducting her research on these art forms, Riti discovered that many of the old murals had been repainted many times over, and the overlaying of colours had diminished the beauty of the original patterns. In



4 Dotted Bar attached and Dhaka Flower. Acrylic on Canvas, 3 Panels, 18x21.5in, 14x27in, 18x21.5in

the past, the absence of art materials in these villages led women to improvise and use carbon from old batteries, rice flour, turmeric etc. Today cheap enamel paint is used to 'preserve' the paintings.

For Riti, the presence of these now neglected murals conjures a parallel story of migration where villages are emptied of their youth and families are rendered dysfunctional by migration. Her recreation of the murals on canvas pays homage to the women who made the murals. The artist also displays her research photographs and video, which are juxtaposed alongside her paintings. While observing her work, a host of questions come to mind. Who will return to the village to preserve the murals? Will our culture withstand the test of time? Even the reconstruction post-earthquake overlooked the preservation of the murals in the villages. Thus this exhibition, which is aptly titled 'Awaiting,' is a narrative of the men, women and children who bear the painful impact of migration and displacement. Their long twisted necks seem unable to cope with the load of their psychological and economic trauma. And yet all of them seem to be waiting in limbo for that 'something' to happen—a change that will take their pain away, ease their suffering and transform the economy of the nation. Thus, Ritu's figurative series is not only about pain; it is undoubtedly a collective story of great expectations in the failed state of Nepal.